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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of fantasy in human relationships with emphasis on its contrasting uses in American and Japanese culture. Fantasy is defined as a private world of conversation or expectations of the self that may not be sufficiently verbalized for a person to have a very clear understanding of its meaning in his or her experience. Seven ways that people relate the ideal fantasies of relationship to their daily living are given: (1) They may introject an ideal and expect themselves to live by it, as in Japanese life the most real of realities is the way one is perceived by others; (2) In Western culture the central fantasy is the perfect person who is the image of God (God is love); (3) Americans judge all actions of the other person against their ideal; (4) Americans try to establish the ideal relationship by an effort to change the other person into the person of their ideal; (5) A way to deal with the fantasized relationship in American culture is to maintain a relationship only so long as it exists in accordance with our private fantasy; (6) One of the more common uses of American fantasies is to reverse the Japanese view that the cultural ideal is the real and to project feelings as the ideal; and (7) They can grow weary of human interaction and live out much of their time in fantasies, which is the essence of loneliness. (HKM)

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Fantasy in Human Relationships: Japanese vs Western Cultures in Images of the Ideal

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This paper is designed to lift out a feature of human relationships, existing sub rosa, that is probably a source of much of the psychic evolution of the human race, and at once a source of some of the more devastating experiences of life, intimate and public.

The paper is built on two assumptions. The first is that there is a private world of conversation with the self (intrapersonal communication, self-talk, imagination) that is by definition of the word private usually shared only with the self.[1] Second, if this conversation is completely private, it may not be sufficiently verbalized for the person to have a very clear understanding of its meaning in his or her experience.[2]

The psychological and communication literature is replete with references to the fantasy world of individuals about themselves, somewhat apart from others. The more common terms used in the discussions are the perceived self and the idealized self. Erik Erikson has observed that the person "of today suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should -- or indeed, might -- be or become."[3]

But here we are concerned with a facet of that, of the self-talk that imagines relationships with other people and silently converses with them.

> "Sometimes fantasy mirrors behavior as a direct model. Sometimes it inverts it or substitutes the opposite for the overt form. Sometimes fantasy creates new possibilities or enriches the mental life in ways that have no correspondence to overt behavior. Knowing only fantasy we cannot predict behavior. Knowing behavior we cannot predict fantasy. Each is a creative realism in itself."[4]

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All of which is to say we all live a double life, one public, one private. Bales, in his work, does not argue that our private and public conversations are not related. Like our night dreams our day dreams take care of our needs, fears, and frustrations in ways that interaction with others does not fully satisfy.

Using Bales' terminology "fantasy chains", the Bormanns discuss the role of fantasy in a group.[5] At that moment when problem solving bogs down in confusion or weariness, the tension explodes in irrelevant and humorous remarks. Analysis of these remarks reveals the fantasies of the group as to whom they perceive themselves to be and who they would like to be. Whispering between two, smothered laughter, and groans are common indicators that a chain of fantasies has erupted in a group. Sometimes the comments that follow are a kind of unconscious toasting or celebration of the group life. Sensitive teachers and good group leaders know that it is important to exploit these moments else the group does not develop its own culture, or in fact does not take on real life, existing only in a mechanical way.

Psychological literature has long dealt with the fantasies of relationships, indeed the very description of our pathologies are categories of relational fantasies. The paranoid sees himself as a victim of power in the hands of evil people. The schizophrenic has "delusions" about who he is and thus changes his relationships with others. The catatonic fixes himself into some relationship with something that blots out all the other relationships that have been too painful to deal with. The neurotic becomes sick and thus drops the responsibility for the relationships that have become too heavy to bear. The perspective of these descriptions was the focus of Reusch and Bateson in their classic: Communication, The Social Matrix of Psychiatry in which they say, "The concept

of communication would include all those processes by which people influence one another."[6]

One of the more recent explorations into the role of fantasy in relationships is a case study of the conjured relationships people, in a Mass Media Age, have with celebrities.[7] These relationships are usually friendships or loves. Some people watch a "friend" on television and carry on a commentary, praising and chiding the friend for his or her performance. Others develop a deeper attachment, in which one, in silence, lives out a scenario of direct interaction with the fantasized friend or lover. Many mass media addicts have been comforted for years by the imagined devotion of an Elvis Presley or a Doris Day.

Though many people can find little or no satisfaction in living out an imagined intimate life with a celebrity, perhaps all of us have relationships which are idealized and in one way or another are fitted into our everyday lives. And almost all of us experience fantasies about ourselves in future relationships which some psychologists are currently employing in order to help college students make career choices.[8]

What we have not examined, insofar as the writer knows, is the ways that the private fantasies about a relationship bear on the everyday relationships of life.

There are at least seven ways that people relate the ideal fantasies of relationship to their daily living:

1. We may introject an ideal and expect ourselves to live by it. This central use of fantasy in relationships, which we commonly call Platonic idealism, was brought into sharp definition for the writer by his experience in trying to understand his interactions on a recent visit to Japan.

Under what we see as "face-saving" is a highly introverted culture in which the idealized relationship is of prime importance. Though the ubiquitous bowing

one sees in Japan is the most obvious nonverbal reflection of the significance of the fantasized relationship, it also is revealed in the subtle humor and softness of voice, the musical rhythm and wave-like intonations of Japanese spoken English. We are confounded and amazed to hear in response to "Would you like to follow this up further?" "Yes, I would not perhaps want to explore this further." One is more likely to hear "American interpretation, perhaps," instead of "No, that is not how I see it." A person is usually not disagreed with openly. Though one feels the personal assertiveness of the Japanese person, one also feels the very important need to avoid the abrasive. As vividly portrayed in the historical novel Shogun, the Japanese try to work out their personal decisions and directions, ultimately doing what they plan to do, but enroute saying "yes" to all differing and sometimes disputing parties. One may call it face-saving concern or even duplicity.

But one does not really sense the central role of fantasy and what is taking place until one examines the core of Japanese personality.[9] The "I" in Japanese life is clearly felt as a social existence.[10] If it is true, as one of the first tenets of communication holds, a person cannot be known to his or her self except through another person, then it should not come as a surprise that some cultures sense the self as one's impact on others.[11] In Japanese life the most real of all realities is the way one is perceived by others. The essence of Japanese energy is the creation of the reality of the image one conjures in interaction. Thus the devotion of the Japanese to Japanese culture, for if the heart of one's reality is the response of others one must have a consistency of culture to acclimate to. If one can keep this focus in mind then it is easy to understand how living up to one's obligations to the nation (chu), to the family (ko), to the world and to one's name (giri), have been the guides of behavior since the

days of feudalism. With the coming of industrialism, and accelerated by the impact of World War II, the order of obligations has been changing. Fealty to Japanese life is perhaps as strong as ever, but the first order of obligations is to the work group, the people of the corporation one works with. At this point in history, Japanese leadership reasons that the dream of the culture cannot be furthered by militarism, and thus the obligation to the nation in political form is perhaps at the bottom of Japanese obligations. That does not alter the character of Japanese personality. It reflects, rather, its adaptation to a changing world.

Life is essentially a series of transactions with people in which ON is the incurring and the paying of obligations, guided by principles of human relationships. As Inazo Nitobe pointed out in Bushido, the Soul of Japan, [12] justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, sincerity, honor, loyalty, and self-control form the way of life in Japan. Our point for here would be that these ideals are all fantasies of human relationship.

None of these ideals are foreign to the West. But they do not generate the core of energy of our life for our basic fealty is to our image of Jehovah - or Baal. Our basic meaning is to be found in our relationship with our God, not our relationships with the people of our culture.

In Japan the ideal is personified in the Emporer and if in the name of the Emporer even the forfeit of life is required, traditionally, this has not been overly difficult. One can in death find the act that achieves perfection for the self, and in a sense, one is fortunate, for ultimately the body, under whatever circumstances, decays and dies. Traditionally, seppuku, or ritual suicide, has not been sacrifice of the self; self-destruction is the way all persons, with whatever problem, can succeed in the end. It is the way to achieve the

ideal for the person who in the complexities of life has lost all other options.

With some understanding of the ethereal character of Japanese reality, the westerner is able to gain some understanding of the dedication to kamikaze tactics in the last year of World War II. Vice Admiral Onishi Takijoro, who initiated and commanded the suicide tactics of the war, early in its organization, presented to his staff the following 31 syllable poem, reflecting the spirit of the strategy.

> "Today in flower,
> Tomorrow scattered by the wind--
> Such is our blossom life,
> How can we think its fragrance lasts forever?"[13]

Near the close of the war the Dai Nippon Physical Culture Society prescribed calisthentics for the purpose of increasing strength and warmth in the absence of bedding and food. "The more shortage of food there is, the more we must raise our physical strength by other means."[14]

Material reality is second to the reality of fantasy. In order to insure that, Japanese logic must be different from the logic of the West in at least these several ways:

a. Whatever happens was planned. If the ideal fantasy is the indestructable life, then whatever happens is the working out of that plan. Even defeat is victory, if one planned victory.

b. Precaution is cowardice. It proves one does not really believe in the reality of the fantasy, the immaterial.

c. Sincerity is a measure of one's zeal for the ideal. Consider the following broadcast at one point in the war:

> After the air battles were over, the Japanese planes returned to their base in small formations of three or four. A Captain was in one of the first planes to return. After alighting from his plane, he stood on the ground and gazed into the sky through binoculars.

> As his men returned, he counted. He looked rather pale, but he was quite steady. After the last plane returned he made out a report and proceeded to Headquarters. At Headquarters he made his report to the Commanding Officer. As soon as he had finished his report, however, he suddenly dropped to the ground. The officers on the spot rushed to give assistance but alas! he was dead. On examining the body it was already cold, and he had a bullet wound in his chest, which had proved fatal. It is impossible for the body of a newly-dead person to be cold. Nevertheless the body of the dead captain was as cold as ice. The Captain must have been dead long before, and it was his spirit that made the report. Such a miraculous fact must have been achieved by the strict sense of responsibility that the dead Captain possessed.[15]

The captain's feat is described as a miracle, but miracle is basic to the Japanese myth. All Japan knows that "A composed spirit can last a thousand years."

Thus when the fortunes of war in World War II turned against Japan the American effort was actually eased by Japanese suicide strategy, but the effectiveness of the suicide plane, boat, or human torpedo was not the central objective. The Japanese Command knew there was only the slightest possibility of turning the war around by this strategy. But the Command also knew that if Japan lost in glory the Japanese ideal would be rekindled, regenerated, refocused in such intensity that Japan would rise to heights it had not known. At the close of the war one hundred Japanese cities lay 90% in rubble. What has emerged, from the debris, in beauty, brilliance, and civility is among the wonders of the human experience.

This description is not intended to separate out the Japanese way of life as one for emulation or criticism, though the writer does not deny his admiration. What is being emphasized is the power of fantasy and the significance of one turn or use of fantasy in human relationships. The Japanese have introjected their culture as the ideal and a Japanese is taught to expect himself or herself to live up to the obligations of the ideal. More important, the ideal is more real than any material, for if it erodes, decays, or rots that is the consequence

of the failure of human will and action. By contrast, who can keep from growing old and eventually dying? What material does not erode with time? Consider the marble of Athens. Even the mountains of the earth are worn away by the wind and the rain in the course of time. But a beautiful concept lasts indefinitely.

Strange as all this seems to the objective realist, its vivid form serves as a backdrop for exploring the ways we all, less vividly, build our lives around fantasies about our relationships.

2. In western culture our central fantasy is the perfect person who is the image of our God. Or indeed the perfect person is the God we aspire to emulate, and God is love. Thus in varying degrees, depending upon the degree to which we aspire to be perfect, we fantasize the ideal relationship with another person. Peak experience in relationship or even imagined peak experience becomes our guide. In the literature of interpersonal communication, the concepts of empathy, openness, and trust focus upon this perspective. The concept of "thou" basic in Martin Buber's explorations, is a focus upon the fantasy of knowing life as lived by another person, for God understands, loves us, and reveals Himself in persons. Indeed this focus in relationship makes fantasy as central to human relationship as the Japanese ideal. But its logic differs in two very basic ways. The concept of "thou", emerging from one's ideal self, in no way is set against the reality of the material world. To identify with somebody other than the self, though a "fantastic" experience, makes no comment about the nature of the physical world. Nor does it bond us to a community larger than that of the dyad (and God). Thus the fantasy of empathy builds and maintains friendships, but it does not inherently make an ideal of

community or the permanence of commitment. The fantasy of "thou" places honesty at the heart of relationship, in contrast to the Japanese commitment of the self to the ideal of the community.

There is nothing incompatible about the fantasy of community and empathic response to another, but they are different and demand a different logic.

3. Another way we use our ideal in American relationships is to judge all actions of the other person against our ideal. The interpersonal fantasy of Number 2 above is rooted in the empathic response to a "thou," another person. Thus, certainly, our judgments, basic in the fantasy here described, grow out of the second form of fantasy. But there is a significant difference. The fantasy of judging every response of the other person against out ideal, in sharp contrast to using the ideal as a personal guide, for our own behavior, demands that the other person come to terms with our ideal. This use of fantasy is rooted in the value we, in our culture, place upon control.

> Thus autonomous, more than moral individual... has a proud and vigorous consciousness of what he has achieved, a sense of power and freedom, of absolute accomplishment. Viewing others from the center of his own being, he either honors or disdains them.... His proud awareness of the extraordinary privilegde responsibility confers has penetrated deeply and become a dominant instinct. What shall he call that dominant instinct, provided he ever feels impelled to give it a name? Surely he will call it his conscience.[16]

If the control value is not asserted, spoken aloud, the person lives out two scenarios at once: 1, what he or she says; and 2, what he or she thinks but does not say aloud. And the latter forms a nonverbal message that conflicts with the former. Creative therapists since Harry Stack Sullivan have helped people see that our relationships with both ourselves and others is negatively affected by the criticism and condemnation we experience, even if only in silence.[17]

This foible is generated by our covert demand that people come to terms with our ideal, our fantasy.

In reading the journals of students of interpersonal communication, the writer has learned of the ubiquity of this fantasy in American life -- and its price. One female undergraduate wrote, "I am glad I had a chance to talk with Janice because up to this point no matter what I did in class she never seemed to notice me. I can't stand people not including me and if they don't I soon learn to despise them." Though the young lady is effervescent, conspicuously at the hub of interaction in a group, her journal is a tale of cold loneliness. Her silent demand that others live up to her ideal ends in bitter judgment of others. Thus alone with her despicable feelings, she feels unloved and unlovable.

It does not always follow that the judgment boomerangs with such accuracy but the revelations of many young divorced persons indicate that one of the more common causes of their separation was a daily silent conversation between the ideal romance and the mundane daily interaction with the mate. So finally they find they have to escape that drab relationship. What was said to the self, in silent judgment of the mate, sends the person in search for a more ideal companion.

Perhaps one of the two essential differences here from the Japanese view is that, in our tradition of the free independent person, the ideal against which we criticize others is private instead of cultural. Thus the "obligations" one must deal with in his relationships are the private claims of individuals rather than the common expectations of the community. Second, we tend in our more extroverted culture, to put the responsibility on <u>others</u> to live up to our fantasies. In Japan, as cited, the obligations, or demands, are placed on the self to live up to the community fantasy.

4. One of the more tragic ways of applying our fantasies to our relationships is to try to establish the ideal relationship by an effort to change the other person into the person of our ideal. George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion is a classic drama based on this fantasy. Our observations suggest that it is more common, however, for the female to relate to a man whom she proceeds to try to reform into her ideal -- with the consequence of almost always destroying the relationship. The male is made to feel intolerably inadequate. The more considerate and subtle the wife is in her communication, the more devastating for the male. If she is wholely unconscious of what she is doing the male may learn to be uncomfortable with himself and her without understanding what has taken place.

At least one reader has criticized the above observation as a sexist judgment. If that is true, the writer pleads that he may be forgiven. But he feels the charge of sexism may better be placed against the culture. In western culture a man aska a women for her attention, companionship, and possibly marriage, not the converse. So men, in western culture, select and women wait to be selected, hoping they are selected by the one they would select if the roles were reversed. But that very process means that a male tends to want the female of his choice, as she is. The same process means the woman tends to hope she did not agree to the contract before the closest thing to her ideal seeks her out. The more passive role of the female in the selection process excites the more active working of her fantasy once she is selected.

Indeed, the courting procedures and the roles of the sexes of any culture have a profound effect on the fantasy processes of the sexes. But to follow that up would be a paper in itself.

However, the tendency to try to mold the other into the shape of one's own ideal is a powerful force in all intimate relationships, most particularly between parent and child -- and this perhaps is the way in which cultures are most similar, for by definition culture is the way the society extends itself from generation to generation.

5. Another common way of dealing with the fantasized relationship in American culture is to maintain a relationship only so long as it exists in accordance with our private fantasy. Here the fantasy is rooted in the communication values of the self as an individual. An old love song of several decades ago was entitled "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams." The brevity of more than fifty percent of our marriages, and indeed our fear of deep involvement, suggests that, in our intimate worlds, many people live in the belief that the relationships damaged by conflict must be terminated.

Alvin Toffler sees much of American social activity as "search behavior," a relentless process of seeking out new friends to replace those who have moved elsewhere or those we are drifting away from because we no longer share their interests.[18] George Bach and Peter Wyden take the view that we in America have entered a "psychological ice age" and that except for occasions fueled by sex and alcohol "intimate encounters" are fading from "civilized Western life."[19] This is the line of reasoning cited in the opening pages of William Wilmot's Dyadic Communication and he devotes a chapter to the stages of a relationship: initiation, maintenance, and dissolution.[20] Maintenance says nothing about the correction of a deteriorating relationship.

Let us take an imaginary look at this through Japanese eyes. As a consequence of the Japanese perfection fantasy, the Japanese did not understand in World War II why Admiral George S. McCain was decorated for rescuing crippled

American ships off the coast of Formosa.[21] These were "damaged" goods. In like reasoning, the Japanese expressed contempt for the safety devices of our fighter planes. This reflected our "cowardice." Nor did they understand our emphases upon an extensive hospital corps. If one cannot perform in perfect accord with the ideal one should not perform at all.

Of course, in our idealized fantasy, nobility of the first order is the oath to help the weak and the hurt, at the risk of one's own life. The heroes of our novels, particularly for boys, are those who risk all to help the injured. Perhaps in Japanese eyes, it is difficult to understand how a people who entertain the fantasy that the ultimate in heroic nobility is rescuing the weak and disabled have tended to dismiss the ideal of rescuing a relationship that is fading. Nonetheless, it is true, we in our culture see little heroism and romance in reconciliation of a crippled relationship.

The significance of our view of reconciliation between people in relationship stands out in sharp relief against our knowledge of how people deal healthfully with themselves as individuals when deep stress develops between the perceived self and the idealized image. The effort of the therapist is to bring more congruence or a reconciliation between the perceived self and the ideal self.[22] The change, it turns out, is in the perception of the self, not the ideal. In both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict the ideal remains intact. In relationships with others, however, the American mode at present is to discard the other who does not match our ideals. We, of course, do not have that option in relating to ourselves, and so if we learn to live better with ourselves, we have to accept ourselves. Reconciliation for the correction of a faulty relationship with the self; replacement of the other person in a faulty relationship

with others. Whether this trend to dismiss those who do not match our ideal will continue, remains to be seen. The government and society built on the value of the freedom of the individual is still in its early and experimental stages.

6. In the more painful relationships of life one of the more common uses of our fantasies is to reverse the Japanese view (that the cultural ideal is the real which each Japanese strives to emulate) and to project our feelings as the ideal. Socio-psychological research since the 1940's has conceived of one's feelings of attraction or repulsion for others as one of the dynamics of human behavior.[23] Therapy of all forms is based on the view that faulty perceptions and negative emotions are part and parcel of the same thing. And the bonds of a group of people are those more generalized feelings that we call values.

Since at least the day of Aristotle, we in the West have been warned against irrational or emotional thinking. Indeed the whole view of the mature person in Greek culture is a person who acts logically on the facts of reality. Despite this cultural discipline Aristotle concluded that most people are more persuaded by the credibility of the other person and by his emotional appeals than by the facts he presents.

In recent years the American educational system has come to the view that though it is true that we act on our feelings, and indeed must, if we are to remain healthy, we should recognize that each of us is the owner of his own feelings. Emotions can be aroused by others, but they cannot be given to us. All this is the best we can do to combat the common fantasy, born of self value, that "What I feel about you is the ideal by which I shall be guided." The brittle character of relationships in our culture can be understood when we

sense that the fantasies of many of us are guided by our feelings and that our feelings are perhaps the least stable feature of our lives.

7. If we fail too often to establish good relationships because we keep judging and trying to change the other person (3 and 4), or escape to perfection or the indulgence of our feelings (5 and 6), we can grow weary of human interaction and live out much of our time in our fantasies, as suggested in the research concerning fantasized relationships with celebrities. This is the essence of loneliness. We may establish distant relationships, even with friends and lovers. In the literature we talk about closed and open persons. The relatively closed person has learned to protect his fantasies about the ideal relationship so completely that the basic communications of the life are intrapersonal in character. Given the fact that we can know little about ourselves in any clarity that is not shared, the more we live in private fantasies, protecting the self value, the less we really know about ourselves.

We think we observed in Japan a privacy perhaps as great as in the United States, that some say is enforced by the very density of the population. Yet we had a feeling that since "every" Japanese knows what Japan stands for, that the Japanese person has a sense of self-in-community. If the Japanese lives as much a closed personal life as the American, he or she may enjoy it more, knowing who the self is by means of identification with the culture.

Donald Richie, searching for himself among the islands of The Inland Sea, says the Japanese person knows who he or she is, for a Japanese is what he or she appears to be, finding identity in his or her relationships of the moment.[24] Richie argues that the Japanese are essentially different from us in the United States because they emerged from and belong to their land. They are a part of

it by time beyond reckoning, that Shintoism is in essence identification with the earth. This long identification with the land itself has been reinforced by a Zen Buddhism that conceives of the self as the wedding of one's awareness with everything. In sharp contrast we in the United States are not as yet "possessed of the land." We possess it, and perhaps always shall for we in our perception of the self are very close to Schopenhauer's view, that the self is the unquenchable will. The self is want, whatever we want. Thus self is painful dissatisfaction, and therefore destined to feel separate, alone, alien.

In the writer's dynamic theory of communication-conflict, interactive behavior is perceived as being shaped by the quality of our feelings, and the focus of energy on tasks.[25] But behavior is perceived as shaped from the past by habits, directed into the future by our communication values, the moorings of human life. Human beings are bonded to each other by the interplay of the relative importance we place: on the human community, on each other person we meet, on the need to control them, and on oneself as a unique and independent individual. Our fantasies are scenarios we play out in silence as directed by the relative strength of these four communication values. What the writer is trying to bring into focus in this paper is this: our fantasies are the silent dramatizations of our values. The more our fantasy life is Japanese in character, the more our internal drama is guided by the regard for the ideal community. The more we fantasize living the role of another person the more we identify the feelings and needs of another person and play out that person's experience. The more we are control-oriented, the more our fantasies are dramatic episodes in which we persuade, conquer, or injure another person. Finally the more we prize our unique significance, the more our fantasy life tends to absorb us and to dominate our time and energy.

Erik Erikson's observation of 30 years ago still holds true in America: the person "of today suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should -- or indeed, might -- be or become."

We of Western culture have come from the Greek world in which Socrates has impressed us that "an unexplored life is not worth living." What this paper lifts into focus is this, that an explored life is explored against an ideal. Thus only as we explore our fantasies where everything happens in accordance with our ideals can we know the driving forces in our life. The peculiar ways the ideal works in the silent drama reflects the shape of each person as well as the shape of the East, and the shape of the West.

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